CHAPTER II

THE ECOLOGY AND ECONOMY OF THE AL-QASR AREA

Changing Patterns of Land Use

131 Al-Qasr is located in the Northwestern Coastal Zone, a relatively fertile littoral region forming the northern edge of the Egyptian Western Desert. Extending from Alexandria to Sallum on the Libyan border, the Zone is some 500 kilometers in length and reaches south into the desert some 20 to 50 134 kilometers. A deep soil deposit and a relatively high average 132 rainfall of about 15 centimeters (20 centimeters of rain would 241 be considered "high") permit limited agriculture in this region.

•133 Due to the drainage pattern of the coastal area there is a fair supply of underground water. The rain percolates [192] down through coastal sand dunes and is trapped in man-made underground galleries dating from Roman times. Farther into 312 the desert, cisterns, which also date from Roman times, catch the rains draining off the Libyan plateau to the south. This plateau and the catchment area form the southern boundary of the greater al-Qasr settlement area (see Figure 4). The General Desert Development Authority, an agency of the government, estimates that there are about 3,000 of these

1: Obermeyer E-5 (1964-1965) 1969 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
'Aishaibat

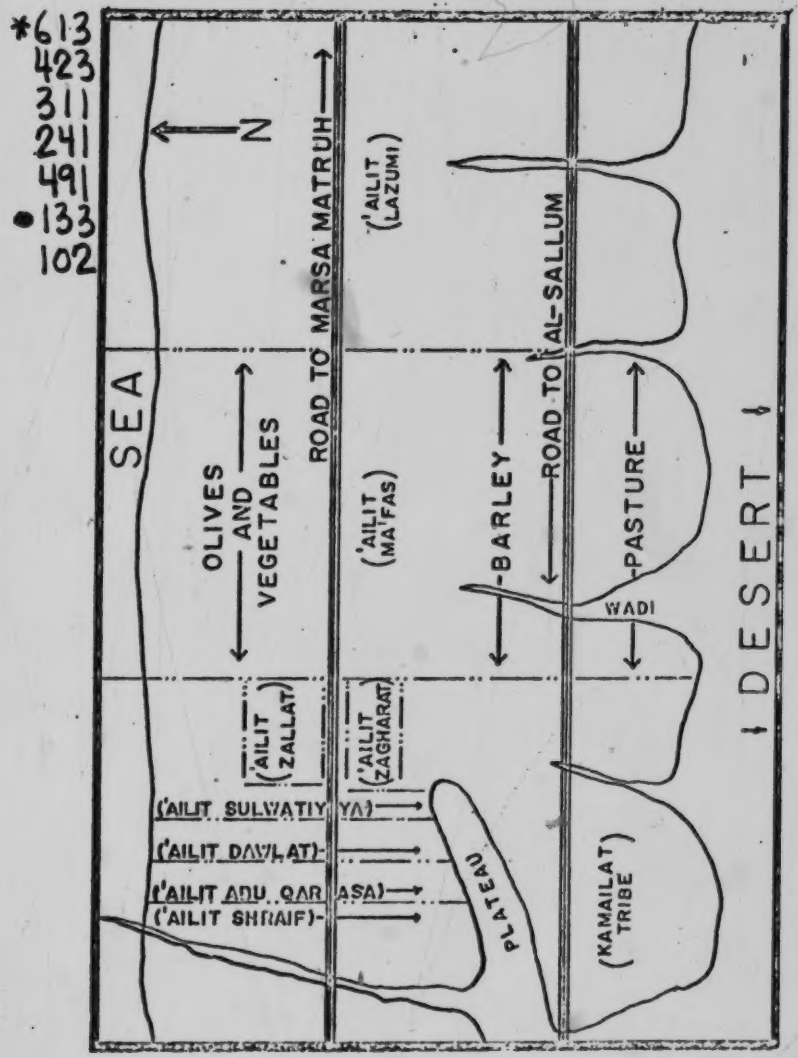
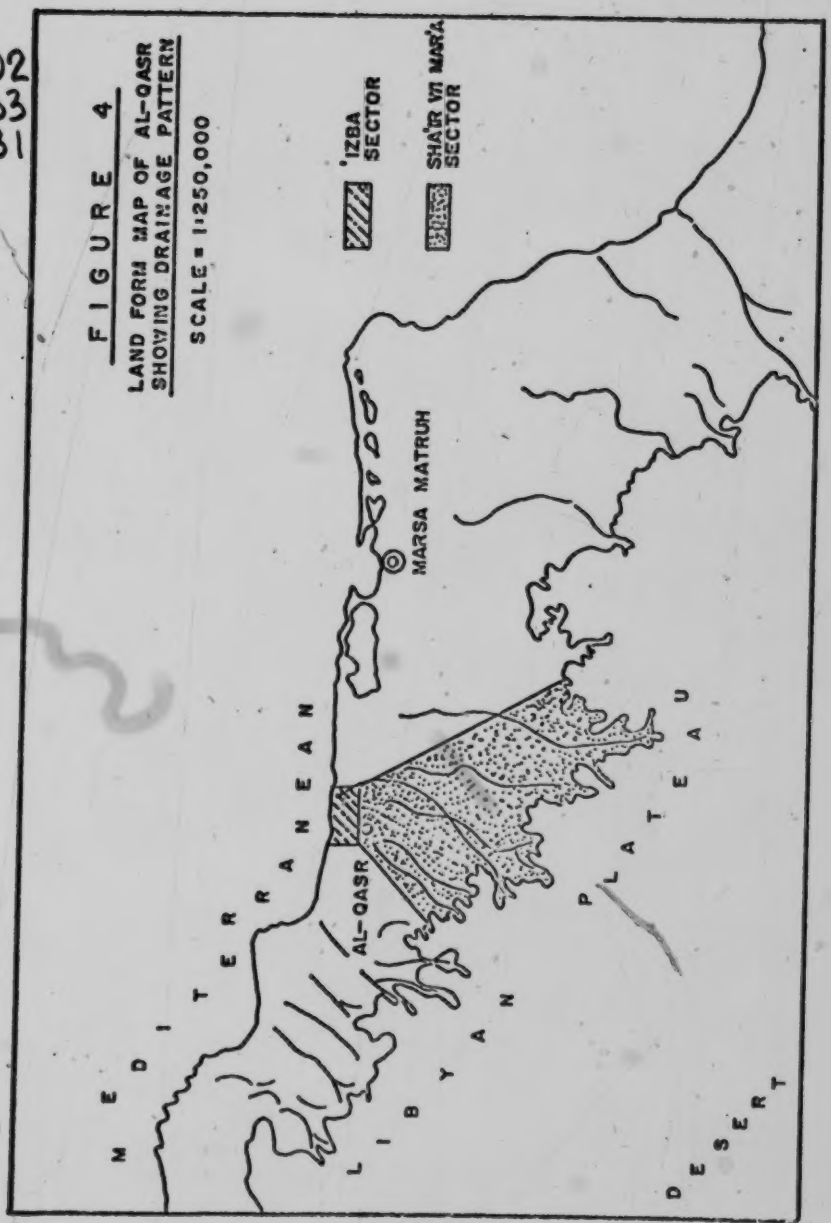


FIGURE 3a. LINEAGE TERRITORIES OF AL-QASR.

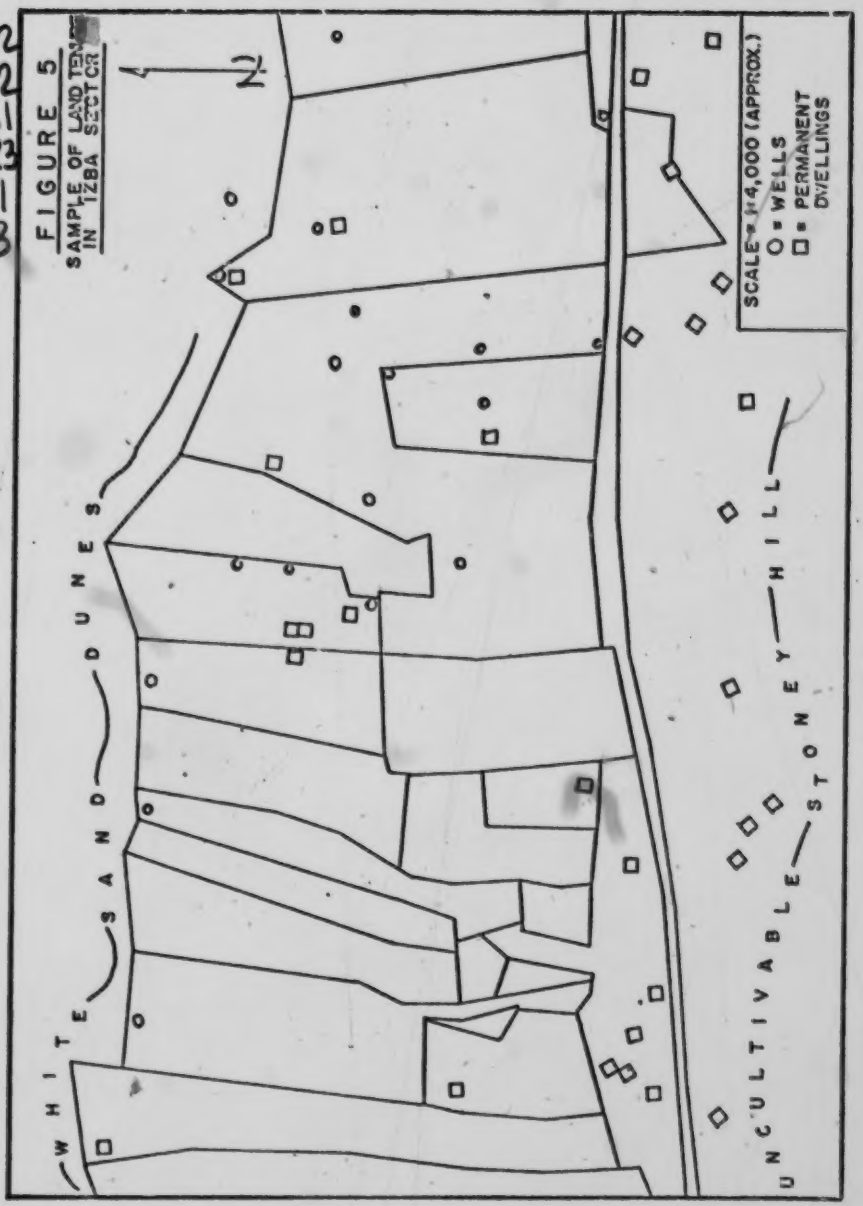
1: Obermeyer E-5 (1964-1965) 1969 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
'Aishaibat

102
133
131



1: Obermeyer E-5 (1964-1965) 1969 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
'Aishaibat

102
312
361
423
311
133



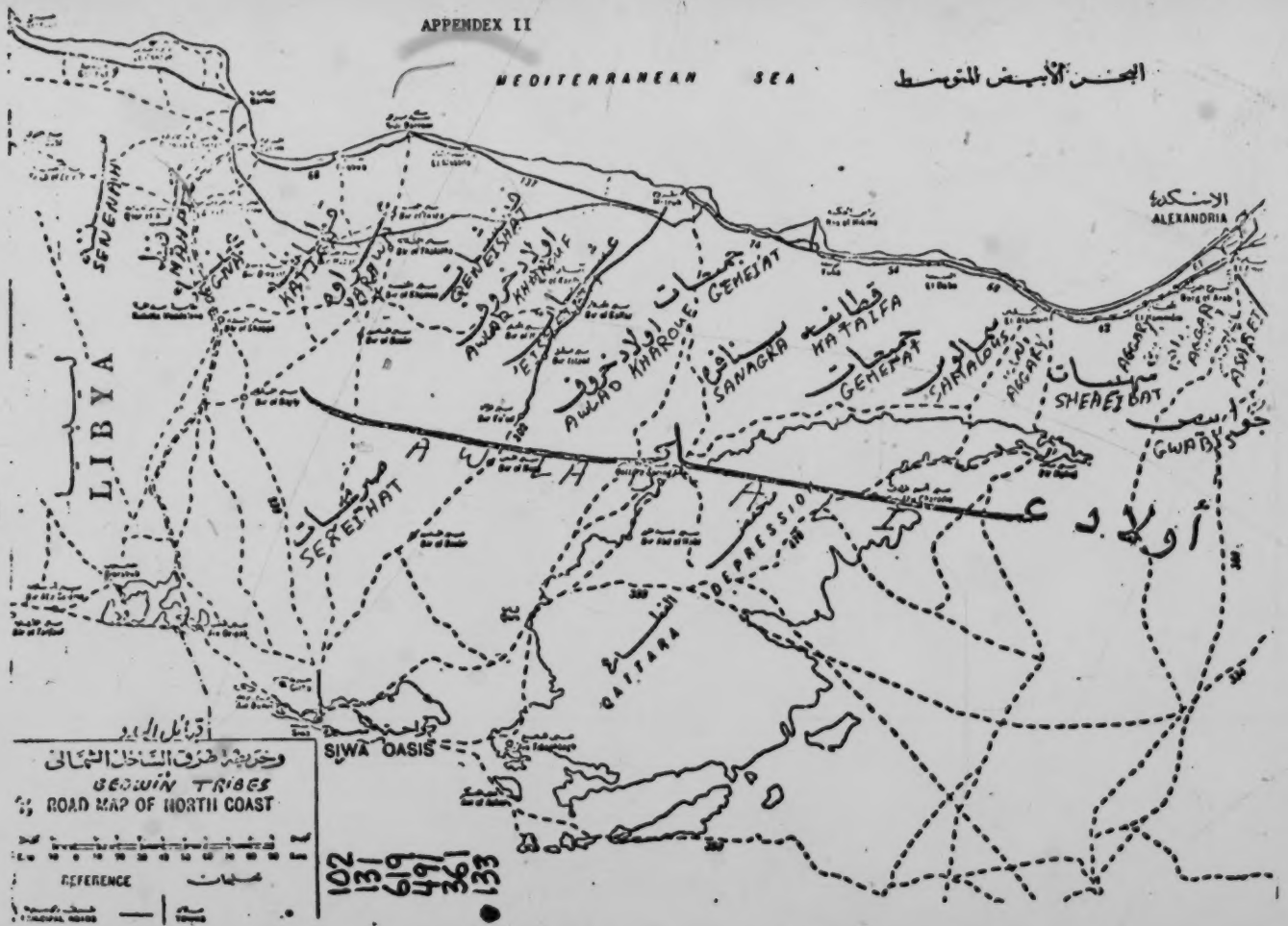
2: Mohsen E,O-5 (1958-1966) 1971 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
Awlad Ali

CHAPTER II

ECOLOGY AND HISTORY

619 Awlad Ali are a number of Arabic-speaking semi-nomadic tribes of
101 sheep and goat herders who inhabit the northern part of the Western
162 Desert of Egypt. The total population of Awlad Ali, according to the 1965 preliminary census, was about 100,000 inhabitants. This estimate is, however, very tentative and fluctuates from one year to the next, depending on the circumstances of the pasture in the area. The
131 area they occupy consists of the narrow strip of fertile land which extends along the Mediterranean coast from near Alexandria in the east some 350 miles westward to the UAR-Libyan border town of Sallum, and varying in width from ten to thirty miles. Vegetation in the area de-
132
133 pends on rainfall, supplemented by a number of artesian wells. The rainy season extends from November to March, but the rain is extremely erratic in nature, varying from one year to another and from one place to the next. Draught has been experienced every three to four years, one of them being experienced at the time of the study. The water situ-
312 ation is further aggravated by the low technological level of the people
[181] which prevents them from making the best use of the available rain water. There have been some attempts made to store as much of the rain water as possible, but these attempts are usually made by individuals and in too crude and primitive a way to prevent most of the water from being lost by seepage or by evaporation. The most commonly used method of water preservation in the area is digging cisterns in the ground. But most of these cisterns are too shallow to keep large amounts of water. Some deeper wells are found in the area and are called "beer sama"

APPENDEX II



184

2: Mohsen E.O-5 (1958-1966) 1971 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
Awlad Ali

3:Evans-Pritchard E-4, 5 (1942-1944) 1949 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
(1837-1942) Sanusi

[P.29]

CHAPTER II

THE BEDOUIN OF CYRENAICA

I

In the last chapter I recorded the development of the Sanusiya. 128
In this chapter I give a brief description of Cyrenaica and of the way of life of the Bedouin who live there and an equally brief account of the history of these Bedouin and of their tribal system.

The geographical isolation of Cyrenaica proper, the large 13
peninsula which juts into the Mediterranean from the Bay of al-Sallum to the eastern Sirtica, has greatly affected its history. It is cut off from the Nile Delta by 700 km. of semi-desert and from Tripolitania by 650 km. of the Sahara round the shores of the Sirtica, while to the south of it stretch endless desert wastes, for Cyrenaica proper is only just over 200,000 sq. km. with a Saharan hinterland of over 500,000 sq. km. On the other hand the coast of Cyrenaica lies only 300 km. from Crete and 400 km. from the Greek mainland, and it belongs by climate and vegetation to Europe.

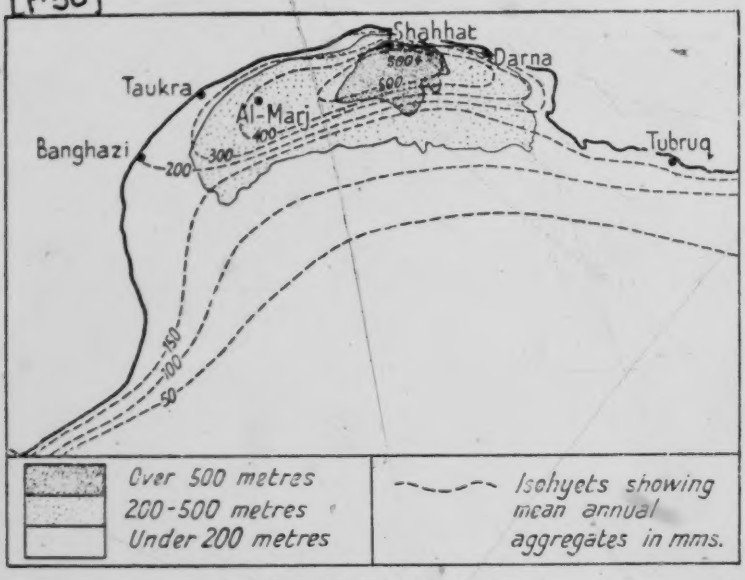
The physiographic features of the country which influence 133 •
to any extent the life of its people can rapidly be summarized. 137
Northern Cyrenaica is a calcareous mountain rising to a table-land, *al-Jabal al-Akhdar*, the Green Mountain, so called from its evergreen forests. To the north its slopes rise steeply from the sea or its littoral, while to the south it billows gently towards the great Saharan desert. The two major divisions of the country are known as *al-jabal*, the mountain—or *al-ghaba*, the forest, since its northern part is covered with bush—and *al-barr*, the steppe. The mountain and the steppe alike fall into 133
a number of zones, the principal of which are shown in the accompanying sketch-map. There is a narrow strip of coastal plain which broadens towards Banghazi and then spreads south-westwards into the great *barqa* plain. Animal transport can [492]
only mount the plateau from the coast by steep and infrequent paths which lead up deep ravines to the first terrace, the so-called *arqub* country, a succession of thickly wooded ridges broken into myriad bosses and cut deep by many wide wadis,

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 31]

3:Evans-Pritchard E-4, 5 (1942-1944) 1949 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
(1837-1942) Sanusi

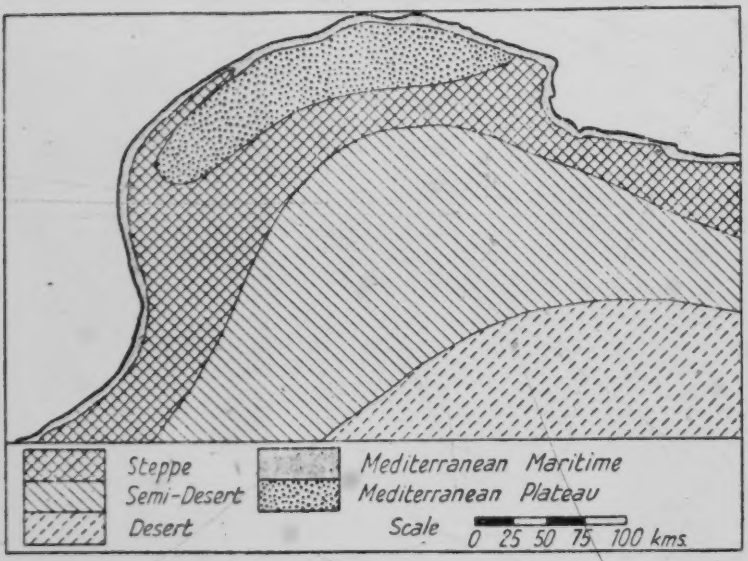
[P.30]

102
132
133



Rainfall and the Plateau Area.

102
13



Climatic Zones.

3:Evans-Pritchard E-4, 5 (1942-1944) 1949 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
(1837-1942) Sanusi

the steep sides of which make east–west journeys slow and arduous. To the west this broken country levels down, and in a bay in the hills lies the extensive treeless, but very fertile, basin of al-Marj, known to Europeans as the Barce Plain. It was colonized in classical times and again recently by the Italians. The Arabs call this first terrace *lusaita* (*al-wasaita*), the middle part, because it lies between the coastal plain and the plateau tableland formed by *al-zahir*, the second terrace. This tableland is famous for its Graeco-Roman ruins and is dotted also with the deserted farms of Italian colonists. It mounts to a narrow third terrace, at about 875 metres above sea level, from the top of which one can look down on these settlements.

The plateau slopes southwards through a juniper belt. There forest ends and it continues to roll to the southern steppe in stony undulations dissected by many wadis. In the plain at its foot there is plenty of grass and low scrub, and vegetation is thick in depressions, but the country becomes increasingly desolate the farther to the south one journeys towards the lifeless wastes of the Sahara. The eastern part of Cyrenaica is more arid than the west or centre. The Marmarica, the *batnan* of the Arabs, is characterized by low hills rising from the coastal belt and prolonged towards the south to create a succession of crests of several kilometres in depth. The mean annual rainfall is low and wells are restricted to the coastal belt. However, there is, probably in most years, a certain amount of grazing to some fifty miles from the coast during the rains. The Sirtica, the extension of Cyrenaica to the west, is a vast rolling treeless plain traversed by a series of wadis running north–south which in their spread provide most of the summer grazing. Wells are found only near the coast but pasturage is plentiful till the Wadi al-Farigh is reached.

The rainfall very exactly determines the vegetation belts and thereby limits human distribution and imposes a certain way of life. The amount of precipitation depends on a number of circumstances. Mean annual rainfall decreases from west to east. Altitude also affects it. More significant, however, are the variation with latitude, the seasonal rhythm, and annual irregularities. The accompanying map shows how rainfall decreases rapidly from the coast, how only the very limited plateau area is subject to heavy precipitations (400–550 mms.),

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 33]

3: Evans-Pritchard E-4, 5 (1942-1944) 1949 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
(1837-1942) Sanusi

102
133
131
361
619

KEY

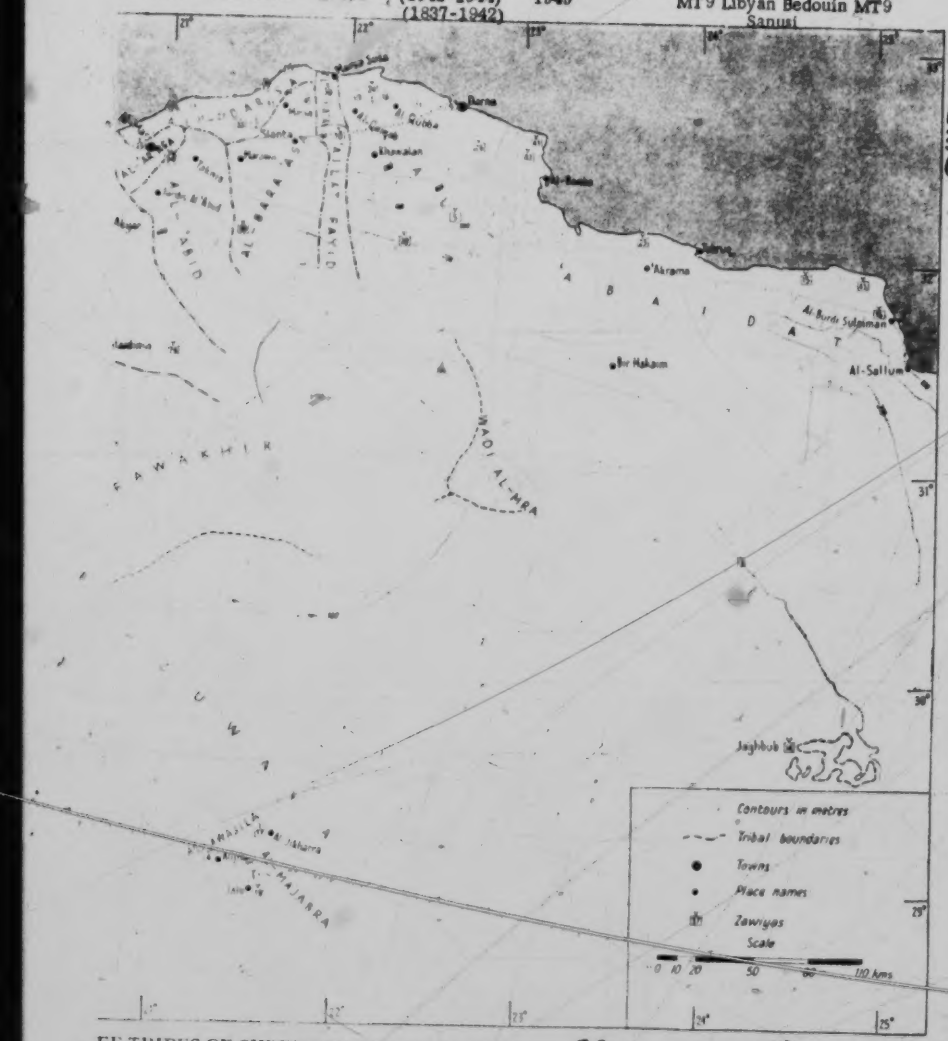
1. al-'Arq
2. al-'Arqub
3. Asqafa
4. Aujila
5. al-'Azziyyat
6. Banghazi
7. Bishara
8. Dariyana
9. Darna
10. al-Fayidiya
11. al-Hamama
12. al-Haniya
13. al-Huwaiz
14. Jaghbub
15. Janzur
16. al-Jarfan
17. al-Jikharra
18. Khashm Rzaiq
19. al-Libba
20. al-Makhili
21. Mara
22. Marada
23. al-Marassas
24. Maraziq
25. al-Marj
26. Martuba
27. Mirad Mas'ud
28. Msus
29. al-Naufiliya
30. al-Nayyan
31. Qafanta
32. Qarabarbi
33. al-Qasrain
34. al-Qasur
35. al-Qatafiya
36. Shahhat
37. al-Tailimun
38. Talmaitha
39. Tart
40. Taukra
41. Umm Hafain
42. Umm al-Razam
43. Umm Rukba
44. Umm al-Shakhanab
45. al-Zawiya al-Baida

[facing P. 34, A]

THE CHI

3t Evans-Pritchard E-4, 5 (1942-1944) 1949 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
(1837-1942) Sanusi

102
133 ●
131
361
619



EF TRIBES OF CYRENAICA (after De Agostini) [facing P. 34, B]

3:Evans-Pritchard E-4, 5 (1942-1944) 1949 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
(1837-1942) Sanusi

day, but even ethnically the Bedouin are more Arabian than the people of Egypt, the Sudan, and Tripolitania, while culturally they are as completely Arab as any people in the world, proud Tamim and Quraish not excepted. In essentials their language is that of the Hilalian invasion of the eleventh century and no foreign language competes with it. The Berber-speakers are a handful in the distant oasis of Aujila, and even there they are bilingual, and the insignificant fractions of Jews and Cretans in the towns speak Arabic, the Cretans being Muslims as well. The Italian immigrants left the country of their own accord during the late war. Thus the obstacles to complete Arabization in the Maghrib (Tripolitania, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco), a Berber culture, large Jewish colonies, and European colonization are to-day all absent in Cyrenaica. In all essential matters also the Bedouin of Cyrenaica are like Bedouin tribesmen elsewhere in the Arab world: they have the same tented, pastoral, way of life, the same social organization, the same laws and customs and manners, and the same values.

The people of Cyrenaica are linked to the classical Arab world of the east, to Egypt and the Jazirat al-'Arab (Arabia, Palestine, Iraq, and Syria) rather than to the Maghrib; to the sacred towns of Islam and to Umayyad Damascus, 'Abbasid Baghdad, and Fatimid Cairo. More particularly they are linked to Egypt, with which their country has had political ties from the earliest times, and which is their natural market. The desert comes down to the sea at the Gulf of Sirte and separates Cyrenaica from Tripolitania and these two countries have always gone each its own way. Cyrenaica was linked to Graeco-Egypt, Tripolitania to Phoenician Carthage. Cyrenaica went with Byzantium, Tripolitania with Rome. Indeed, as Despois says: 'The Greater Syrtis is without dispute one of the most decided frontiers, natural and human, to be found anywhere in the world.'[1]

During the last few decades this separation has been brought into relief again by the rise of the Sanusiya Order, for whereas almost to a man the Cyrenaicans follow the Order politically, the Tripolitanians, except for the Bedouin tribes, have shown a lively animosity towards it. Moreover tribal ties between the

[1] Op. cit., p. 45.

4: Peters E-5 (1948-1950) 1970 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
Cyrenaica

613 619 621 At the next level of segmentation (this now being the tertiary order in any given tribe) the number of segments which appear is conspicuously irregular. For the Magharba tribe, the four secondary segments, 'Ali, Mansur, Subh and Nasr are divided into thirteen, six, four, and four segments respectively. Similar irregularity appears in other tribes.[11] The pattern of the genealogy is always one of regularity in the number of segments at all points in it except for the point of tertiary segmentation where conspicuous irregularity becomes immediately evident. Since these 613 619 621 segments constitute the summer camps of the Bedouin, this is not surprising, for these small groups will show greater susceptibility to details of local water supplies, pasturing facilities, ploughland 133 areas, and topographical features than would the numerically 182 larger and structurally superior groups occupying larger areas of territories of greater ecological importance. If we follow the line 131 from Sa'ada to Nasr again, the bifurcation at the first order of segmentation is consistent with the division of the country into the permanently green high altitudes of the plateau, and the extended low-lying plain area of the western half of the country. [134] Between the territory of the Magharba tribe ('The White Plain') and that of its neighbour tribe, the 'Awaqir ('The Red Plain'), there is a major soil difference, which is such a conspicuous feature of the landscape, and so sharply defined, that one is almost aware when one has crossed the tribal boundary. Within the Magharba tribe, a prominent dry river valley cuts the territory in two, the landscape to the west of it being characteristically serrated, making travel in an east-west direction difficult, while to the east the landscape is much more docile and undulating. The four sections of the ash-Shamakh branch again represent four quite distinct areas. The territory of one section is almost conterminous with the narrow belt of sand dunes along the coast; the territory of another is a block of rough and tumbled land in the west; the territory of a third, in the centre, is made up of a few low-lying shallow valleys; and the territory of the fourth,

[114] [11] It is necessary here to warn the reader that, brilliant an ethnographer as Agostini undoubtedly was, his grouping of tribal sections is not always correct. I had his book (Agostini 1922–23) with me in the field and checked his tribal survey. I found that at several important points his ordering of the segments was incorrect. I should add that the differences between Agostini and myself are not due to the kind of changes discussed in this article.

4: Peters E-5 (1948-1950) 1970 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
Cyrenaica

stretching across to the village of Ajadabiya in the east, topples in undulations away into the flat expanses of the desert to the south. At all these points of segmentation, the territories occupied by the various sections are large and roughly defined, and the population aggregates supported on these territories run from over a thousand at one end to tens of thousands at the upper limits. The tertiary sections are numerically much smaller, some of them numbering as few as a hundred souls in all, and the territories to which they are attached are correspondingly smaller. The relationship between the numbers in this order of section, and the precise amount of water available in the local wells is an intimate one. If the population of one of these groups increases, or if the number of animals rises, or if the springs show a decline in the volume of water they give forth, or if the winter rainfall has allowed the storage in wells of only a small quantity of water, a rearrangement of the group must be effected. A significant alteration of any one of these components must mean that the local group must split to enable a new adjustment to be made in the relationship of man and animals to water.

Whatever changes occur within groups of any size, since the genealogy embraces the entire population, these must appear on the genealogy in some way or other. Now a genealogy is as rigid a framework, as fixed and final a pattern of grouping, as can be imagined. The impression that they are thus rigid and fixed, except for the addition of successive generations, is strengthened by the way in which the Bedouin use them. From their young boys to their old men, the Bedouin are expert genealogists, and the names of ancestors, for one reason or another, are never far from their lips. Names are kept alive by constant use, since all references to inter-group relationships must be in terms of these names. More than this, the Bedouin were proud to the point of boastfulness of their genealogical knowledge, and, wherever I travelled, the first request I had to comply with was to take down a large portion of a tribal genealogy. In recording their endless genealogies, one feature about them came to assume increasing interest; while there was remarkable unanimity with regard to most of the names given, there was one point of marked ambiguity—at the tertiary level of segmentation. I recorded genealogies in four tribes on an extensive scale, and in each tribe

5: Peters E-5 (1948-1950) 1967 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
Cyrenaica

621 613 628 682 hundred of their sheep are grazing in the neighbourhood. This is beside the point. What is important is that the offender's group is showing a desire to remain on friendly terms, and members of the victim's group are doing likewise by accepting reduced amounts. Compared with what the payments should be, after four years they are trivial and soon cease altogether. Blood money, if it is to achieve the purpose of 621 613 628 682 restoring peaceful relationships, must work in this way among the Bedouin, for, as they view the matter, a single payment of the full amount would only terminate relationships. There would be no further obligations to hold them together. The payment of a debt in full means only one thing—hostility. Where there is no debt, 571 182 there are no relationships. Debt must be allowed to run between groups, for it is this which creates obligations and perpetuates social relationships.[1] As the debt of blood money mounts, the social relationships between the groups improve. The cessation of payments and the absence of further demands is final earnest that the relationships are again normal.

613 628 682 The second step in this exposition, therefore, is to attach to homicide between tertiary sections the penalty of vengeance or the payment of blood money, both achieving the same end of bringing about a restoration of peaceful relationships.

682 619 613 Between secondary sections, relationships are again different. Ecologically, the areas are distinct. The topography may be dissimilar—sand dunes in one area and low valleys in another; secondly, the soils may differ—sandy soil here and firm valley [133] bottom soil there; thirdly, while the climatic régime of the two areas may be broadly [132] similar, since there is marked variability in the aggregate annual rainfall which is coupled with a high variability from place to place, each secondary section has its own micro-climate, sufficiently well defined for one area to be well watered in any given year while a neighbouring area suffers partial drought. These differences affect [221] productive activities. Seasonal movements are also affected: some secondary sections move annually over considerable distances and in fixed directions, while members of a collateral section may move only a few miles and these short moves may vary in direction from year to year. It is true that minor ecological differences exist between collateral tertiary sections, but these do not affect the economy and the way of life in the manner described for secondary sections. Partly because of their territorial extent, partly because of the larger aggregate population, the secondary sections are more self-contained, not only ecologically and economically but also in terms of social relationship. More of the requirements of everyday living can be met within the territory and span of a secondary section than within those of a tertiary section. Secondary sections develop a kind of specialization to the extent that in any year some of them will have more usable natural resources than others, but because these differences are ephemeral they do not lead to the development of permanent trade relations. Add to all this the fact that agnates are concentrated in camps on the territory which belongs to their lineage, and the discreteness of secondary sections is [582] immediately apparent. Marriage rules make this discreteness potentially, at least, even more sharply defined, for unlike other 'lineage societies' where exogamy, coupled with other marriage regulations, compels the dispersion of kin links among lineage

[1] This point becomes clearer when considered in the general context of debt relationship among the Bedouin. Marriage payments, gift exchanges, hospitality, various forms of help, and so on are all aspects, with blood money, of an intricate and fascinating web of debt relationships.

7:Abou-Zeid E-5 (no date) 1959 MT9 Libyan Bedouin MT9
Egypt

villages and towns, especially at Mersa Matrouh which is the seat of the local government. The second world war was also influential in changing attitude and social values. Men who were employed as unskilled labourers during the war by the different combating armies became accustomed to paid jobs and to cash remuneration, which had previously been practically unknown to them. When the war ended, it was not easy for those workers to go back to the old nomadic life with all its hardships and insecurity. Some of them preferred to migrate to the Delta, while the others decided to settle down to work in the desert villages and towns as servants or as unskilled labour in the local government departments, schools, hospitals, etc. Most of the younger men now prefer to follow their example; the settled sedentary life is thus gaining ground all the time at the expense of livestock husbandry.

But important as they may be in accelerating the drift from nomadism to sedentary life, these factors fall beyond the scope of this paper and need not be discussed further in this context. We shall be concerned with the plans and schemes which are deliberately designed to deal with the settlement of the nomadic and semi-nomadic clans. But before going on to consider this problem we should like to give a brief outline of the area itself so as to establish a clear idea about the general setting, and to see the projects themselves against a background of the whole social life. This should help us to understand more clearly the motives underlying the projects and to discern the effects they may have on the social situation.

Geographers generally divide the Western Desert into three main divisions, each of which has its outstanding characteristics.

1. The northern strip which extends some 500 kilometres along the coast from the west of Alexandria to the Egyptian-Libyan border. This strip, known as the *Dera'a Bahari*, consists mainly of fertile cultivated land which extends some 20 to 30 kilometres to the south, tending generally to become narrower to the west till it almost vanishes at Sollum near the frontiers.
2. To the south of this green coastal zone lies a high plateau in which are a number of depressions, the most important being the Qattara Depression.
3. The rest of the area; i.e. the extreme southern region, is real arid desert.

The coastal zone is the only really inhabited and cultivated part of the desert; beyond it there is hardly any prospect for cultivation. It is also a vital centre to which the scattered clans and groups of herders come to gather round the water points and the artesian wells during the dry season when the water becomes scarce in the southern parts.

The climate of the desert varies between the Mediterranean climate to the north and along the coast, and the sub-tropical dry climate in the southern parts. The dry season is usually very warm, tending to grow hotter southwards; while the wet season, usually extending from November to March, is generally mild especially in the north. Rainfall is very erratic and varies greatly from year to year and from one place to another. But on the whole, there is more rain in the north than in the south, and in most years rain falls in the southern parts only on very rare occasions. Rain may come quite suddenly and cause torrential floods which sweep away dwellings, crops and animals alike. This is typical of the Sallum area.

According to the 1947 census, the Bedouins of the Western Desert number 68,161. Only 23,444, i.e. less than the half of the population, are engaged in